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THE CIVIL-SERVICE LAW

AND

THE RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHTS OF BELLIGERENCY
TO THE CUBANS.

SPEECH

OF

HON. EDWARD ROBB,

OF MISSOURI,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

JANUARY 3, 1898.

WASHINGTON.

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Mr. W. A. Smith

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SPEECH
OF
HON. EDWARD ROBB.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the bill (H. R. 4751) making appropriations for the legislative, executive, and judicial expenses of the Government for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1899, and for other purposes—

Mr. ROBB said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Republican party opposes the double standard, but seems to favor double dealing—that of promising one thing and doing the other. And their promises in relation to their fulfillment, stand at about the ratio of 16 to 1. We find them constantly veering from one position to the other—from a declaration in favor of bimetallism by international agreement, to an effort to more firmly fasten upon us the single gold standard; from a declaration in favor of the civil-service law, to an effort to overturn or modify it for partisan purposes; from a declaration in favor of Cuban independence, to an almost cruel neglect of those people. If the violation and disregard of party platforms and party pledges, were the only offenses; if law, precedents, and the solemn enactments of the Government were not lightly considered, and in many cases openly and notoriously trampled upon and plain statutes set at naught, there might for the time being be more substance in the pending discussion of this civil-service law. With the practice of, applying or refusing to apply it; extending or contracting it in its operation agreeable to the whim or desire of the party in power or the officer in charge, the difference in the effect between the so-called reforming of the law and its complete repeal, would not seem to be as great as one might at first have supposed.

With or without a reformation of the law; with or without its repeal, around the “festal board” of official life are gradually but surely gathered in, those in touch and in sympathy with the party in power. With many, it is true, it is a forlorn hope, and they are driven hence to battle against the pangs of their own disappointment and to reap the rewards, if not of “party,” at least of individual “perfidy.” But there should be no cloak in the shape of a civil-service law, or any other law, to cover up any system of wrongdoing, and no law should remain upon the statute books admitting of such latitude of construction as permits of individuals under the same conditions, being and not being qualified for official preferment.

If the expectations of party followers have been too great; if the promises and pledges of party leaders have been too prolix, the sting of disappointment can not be appeased, and should not be, under cover of one of those automatic laws about which we have recently heard so much. I am of those who believe that party

platforms should not be used as instruments to mislead and deceive, but should be lived up to; that the laws should be administered as we find them and in accordance with their spirit and intent, and that truth and honor should maintain among all men, whether in public or private life. And I am as firmly of the opinion that party loyalty is deserving of party preferment.

If given an opportunity, I shall vote for the repeal of the civil-service law, and that having been accomplished, I will look forward with renewed anticipations, to the glory of that day, and the grandeur and magnificence of this Government, when every engine of its mighty machinery shall be fired with the spirit of liberty, and every cog and wheel and rod and axle shall be lubricated by Democratic energy and kept in place by Democratic honor. That day will come, and come quickly, Mr. Chairman; for the American people are intelligent and they are honest; they are imbued with a sense of justice and right and fair dealing, and will not long tolerate hypocrisy and deception and the violation of solemn pledges by any party or any set of men.

Mr. Chairman, we witnessed but recently, one of the most remarkable and sublime spectacles in the history of political struggles in this country. A great party and a great people, while in power, as it were, turning aside its accredited leaders at the risk of defeat, repudiating them for the sake of a principle which they had violated. Though the career of that party has been one of splendid achievements and matchless statesmanship; though its devotion to principles which are just has been its vitalizing power from its foundation, nothing is more sublime or a more enduring testimony of its incorruptibility and the immutability of its principles than the speedy, determined, and unmistakable terms in which it declared its adherence to the fundamental ideas of its organization—the fundamental principles of our Government. It is, in deed, in truth, and in spirit the “great party of the people.”

Mr. Chairman, have we aught but cause for congratulations to the country and words of good cheer to the hosts of Democracy, with the spectacle as presented by the majority party in this House? The assurances coming from the distinguished gentleman from Indiana [Mr. JOHNSON] that repeal would be disastrous, that no man can be a Republican and be a spoilsman; and the no less earnest appeal coming from the distinguished gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. LINNEY] for a repeal of the law, and with the warning that if it was not done that there would not be enough of them left at the next election to grease a gimlet to bore the hole to put them in.

Well, that would be a most fortunate condition for us to contemplate—the Republican party without grease, and caring nothing for office for the sake of office. Why, they would not even make it interesting. With these apparent different conceptions of different understandings, the only argument therefore that now remains in favor of continuing the law, is the expediency of gratifying a sentiment, and keeping up an outward appearance of a condition that is unreal, and of a practice that does not exist.

It would more comport with the dignity of the American people to get rid of a law so easily and so frequently evaded; and it is of far less consequence to us that the majority party in this House may see fit to set aside their party platform in this respect, than in many other instances in which they have seen proper to disregard it. But, Mr. Chairman, there is another question, which has en-

listed the sympathy and the deep concern of every liberty-loving citizen in our country, and which has more than once been a subject of consideration by the legislative and administrative departments of our Government. I refer to the Cuban question. More than a year and a half ago the Republican party in its national platform declared that—

The Government of Spain having lost control of Cuba, and being unable to protect the property or lives of resident American citizens, or to comply with its treaty obligations, we believe that the Government of the United States should actively use its influence and offices to restore peace and give independence to the island.

Who is here now as the representative of that party seeking to give effect to that declaration? Where is the one among your number who has or will raise his voice in answer to the cry for liberty and the wail of suffering and starving humanity? Where are those of you who will join us on this side of the House in bringing before it at the earliest possible moment the resolution of the Senate, passed at the last session, recognizing belligerent rights to the insurgent Cubans?

What has intervened between then and now occasioning this inaction on your part, on so important a question? Why delay longer in the fulfillment of that solemn pledge, which you published to the world, and assurance of support, to the unhappy people of that unfortunate island?

Situated within less than 100 miles of us; washed by the same waters that wash our shores; embracing a territory of vast prairies, of fertile fields, stretching 800 miles in length by 80 miles in breadth; lying like a gem in the ocean expanse, and in sight almost of this "land of the free and home of the brave," it is but natural that her people should have caught the inspiration of our institutions, and become imbued with that unquenchable desire to breathe the air of freedom.

In the progress of accomplishing this end, a conflict has been waged, characterized on the one side by all the courage, endurance, and generalship of the ancient Greeks, and on the other, by the most inhuman methods of the most barbaric ages. Whether, indeed, the methods which have been adopted by the contending forces have given to the conflict the dignity of modern warfare; whether, indeed, in the midst of the carnage and the desolation which has ensued civil authority, organized and perfected in every particular, has been attained, it is nevertheless a war; a war of savage brutality and unexampled cruelty; a war so momentous in its consequences that it threatens the extermination of an entire people, and the destruction of every productive industry of that once prosperous country. The heroism of that band of patriots; the skill, the ability, the courage, and the manhood with which they have conducted themselves under the most trying conditions; their devotion to a principle—a principle which has lighted the pathway of centuries—has demonstrated over and over again their ability for self-government.

Mr. Chairman, the velvety glove of diplomacy has suffered, if not encouraged, as a means of subjugating the insurgents, a systematic and deliberate course of starvation; and appeals emanating from the head of our Government to the charitable instincts of our people, whilst denying them of the political power and assurances of their Government, which the laws of God, of man, and of nations has given them, does not fulfill the measure of their duty, or the duty and responsibility of this proud Republic.

If I have read with understanding, the recognition of what is called belligerency is the recognition of a fact, that fact being that a civil conflict exists in a foreign state; and the reasons for the exercise of this power are that the rights and interests of the declaring country, are so far affected as to require it to define its position. It is also sometimes put upon humanitarian grounds. The effect of the recognition is to give to the insurgents a recognized status, and the opportunities and privileges accorded under international law. But it is not, if justified by the situation, necessarily an unfriendly act toward the parent State.

Mr. Chairman, it has been said that "a good cause and a good will, animate men to struggle in proportion to the size of their wrongs and the grossness of their oppressors." The Cuban struggle goes on and is unabated. Propositions of autonomy are rejected as insincere, and as concessions obtained at too dear a cost; nothing but absolute independence will terminate the war. The recognition of belligerency by this Government under these circumstances, however construed or in whatever light it might be considered, is a duty it owes to its own citizens; it is a duty it owes to the contending parties, and it is a duty it owes to the peace of the world.

It is a duty which justice and the noblest instincts of humanity demand should be discharged without hesitation or further delay, in keeping with that dignity and firmness which belong to our glorious career as a nation and our preeminent position in the councils of freedom. [Applause on the Democratic side.]

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